THE Shadow STRIKES!
4
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BITTER FRUIT
by Jones & Barreto
EDUARDO BARRETO

FOCUS

When people think about **Richard Wagner's** four-opera cycle, *The Ring of the Nibelung*, they think of The Ride of the Valkyries," perhaps the best known music from the grand tale. Come this fall, however, **Roy Thomas** and **Gil Kane** hope that people will start thinking of their adaptation of THE RING with as much awe.

Both Roy and Gil have had exceptional reverence for the operatic tale of gods and man. In fact, both have drawn inspiration from the source material over the years. Gil first encountered the themes in **Alex Raymond's** *Flash Gordon* comic strip story, "Tournaments of Mongo." "It had that bravura quality and universal appeal," Gil says while sitting in his California studio, putting the finishing touches to Book Three's art. "The story fulfilled all the aspects of heroic fantasy with power and sensuality.

"It wasn't until later that I learned Raymond took all that from Wagner. In the first serial, **Buster Crabbe** was transformed into the living epitome of **Siegfried**, with the dying of his brown hair blond and curling it. These stories are universally hailed and have inspired others, including **Al Williamson**, **Frank Frazetta**, and **Frederico Fellini**."

The Ring tells the tale of a struggle between Wotan, leader of the Asgardian gods, and the Frost Giants. To save the goddess Freis, Wotan uses all his power to obtain the Nibelung Gold and involves a mortal man, Siegfried. There is a sweeping scale to the opera that remains ripe for use in comics.

This is not the first time Wagner's opera cycle is being used in comics form—Roy adapted the core storyline for a run of *Thor* at Marvel a decade ago. The tale itself has evolved over the years, starting off as an Icelandic myth called *The Volsunga Saga* and this pagan myth was transformed over time into the legend of *The Nibelung*. It was then that Wagner took the various known elements of the story and crafted his opera. "This is much the same way that the Arthur story evolved," says Gil, who co-authored, such a tale, *Excalibur!*, with **John Jakes**.

Based on the success of First Comics' *Beowulf*, its editor, **Mike Gold**, thought the time had come to bring *The Ring* to comics. He proposed the idea to **Roy Thomas** shortly after arriving at DC. Roy then called **Gil Kane** about the book. "We've worked together for a long time," Gil says. "He knew my interest in the work and how I wanted very much to draw it.

The Ring has been an obsession; I planned for years to adapt it. I *have* been injecting aspects of the opera into what I was drawing. I feel my very own qualities are lyrical and operatic. *The Ring* ideally suits aspects of my personality.

"I've also read everything in the United States on *The Ring* and Wagner. I've not only been quite enchanted by the material, but I have been a scholar of it as well."

After being enthralled by Raymond's science fiction version of the tale, it was some time before Gil learned the identity of the source material. He was drawn to theater at one point, which led him to author **Eric Bentley** who wrote on heroic fantasy in the theater and thus Gil finally found Wagner and Siegfried.

Gil is certainly no stranger to heroic fantasy, having drawn in all genres from westerns (Johnny Thunder) to super-heroes (Green Lantern and The Atom) to sword and sorcery (Conan and his own creation, Blackmark). During his years in the business, Gil has been trying to mount his own interpretation of the material and has satisfied himself with putting elements of the epic tale in his work. Now, he is working with noted fantasist **Roy Thomas**, also no stranger to heroic fantasy.

After Roy and Gil agreed to do the project it was just a matter of waiting until their schedules were open. Gil was all set to begin at one point—going so far as to complete two presentation paintings showing his visual interpretation of the material—but had to stop for three months to be the production designer for last season's *Superman* cartoon show.

"This is a strict interpretation of the opera," Gil notes. "It is not my own point of view. I am working within those constraints and am following Roy's view. Where possible, I am trying to marry the two points of view and put some emphasis on my ideas in the art."

The one frustrating element of the project has been his distance from the DC offices. "I wish I was there to meet with [Design Director] **Rich Bruning** personally, and talk over the entire package of the series. Also, I would want more time with **Andy [Helfer**, the series editor], but I am happy with the designs I have seen. At least I will be painting all four covers."

Gil pencilled and inked the four **Prestige Format** issues in roughly one year. With this labor of love done, Gil is planning to do two new projects for DC in collaboration with writer **Howard Chaykin**.

Has Gil tired himself on *The Ring*? He emphatically says, "No." This reworking of the opera has not exhausted the potential. I could take the concepts inherent in the four operas and do fresh work on Wagner."

And, like Wagner's classic opera, Gil Kane contents himself to provide stirring entertainment for one and all.

—Robert Greenberger

[Note: THE RING is recommended for mature readers and contains nudity, which may be offensive to some.]

DC LIST

THIS WEEK

DEADMAN: LOVE AFTER DEATH 1
Deadman lives (and loves) again, as he encounters an abandoned circus full of monsters and madness. ★▶

SGT. ROCK SPECIAL 6
Four spectacular war-torn adventures, including searing battle sagas starring Mlle. Marie and Sgt. Rock. ●

THE QUESTION 33
If Vic Sage can't rescue Myra from an assassin—can a savant? ◆▶▲

THE SHADOW STRIKES! 4
The Shadow brings the grisly series of killings to a violent conclusion as he battles the mad monk high atop the Brooklyn Bridge. ◆▶

ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS 13
Vajra escaped from a slavemaster years ago. Now bounty hunters want to take her back for a reunion. ■▶

DR. FATE 13
Linda goes berserk and makes a strange foray into the astral realm—alone. ■▶

LEGENDS OF THE DARK KNIGHT 2
A mysterious bat-man is murdering people in Gotham City . . . amidst rumors of human sacrifice. ◆▶

NEW GODS 11
Orion goes to battle . . . against New Genesis and for Darkseid. ■▶

THE PHANTOM 10
Drought ravages the tiny nation of Khagana. When food shipments disappear, The Phantom steps in to provide relief. ■▶

GREEN ARROW 27
In Seattle, somebody's after Oliver Queen . . . and Travis Morgan gets caught in the crossfire. But say, what's The Warlord doing in Seattle? ■▶

CAPTAIN ATOM 36
It's all-out battle in the streets of Las Vegas. Will even the secrets of the silver shield be able to help Captain Atom? ●

JUSTICE LEAGUE EUROPE 9
Power Girl undergoes a critical operation, with surgical help from Superman. Meanwhile, Elongated Man and Flash finally have it out. ●

SUICIDE SQUAD 36
The entire Squad is reunited on Apokolips and death is in the air as the team takes on the forces of Darkseid and tries to survive. ●

ACTION COMICS 648
With his physical shell degenerating, Brainiac goes all-out to build a new one. ●

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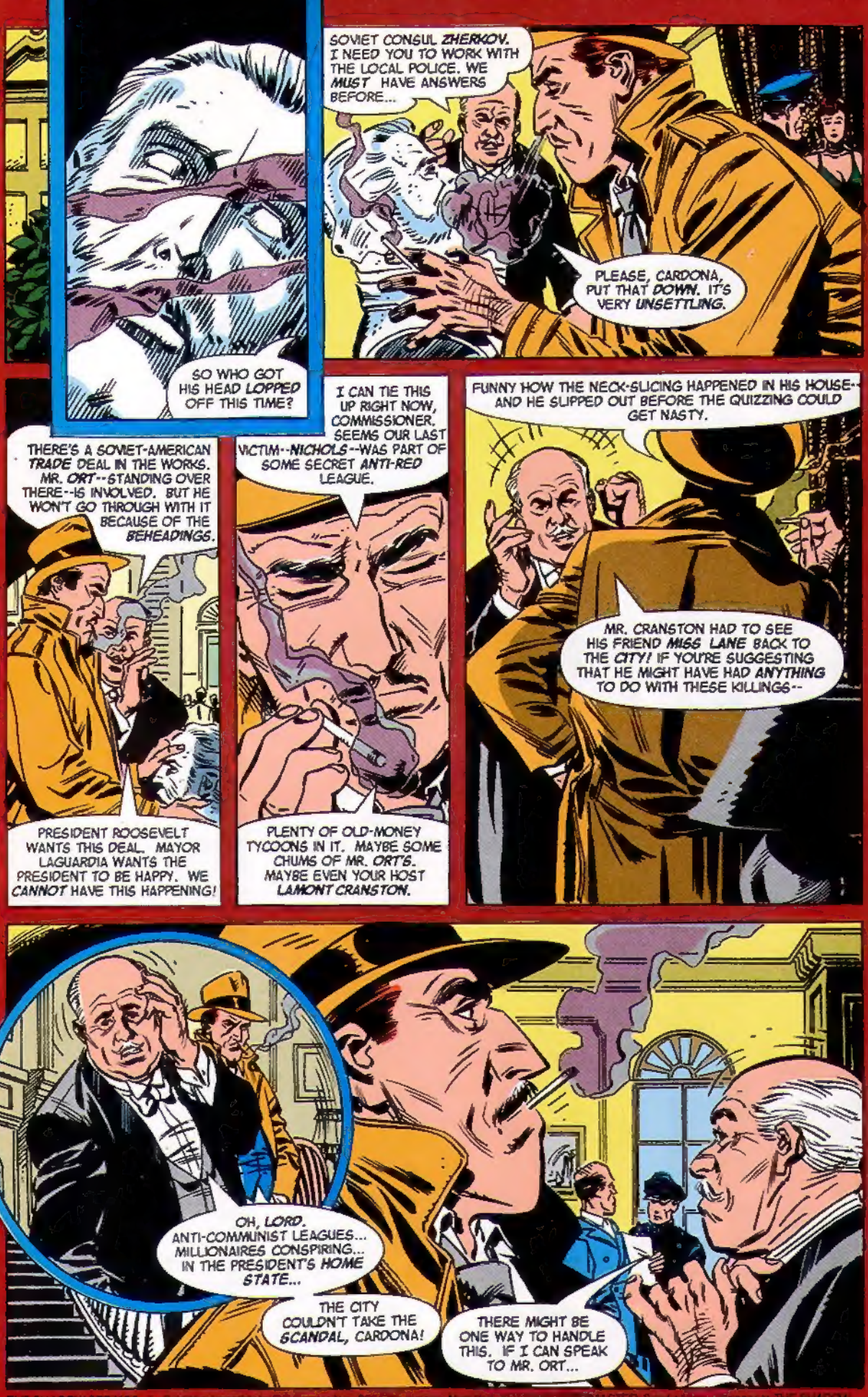
SO WHO GOT HIS HEAD LOPPED OFF THIS TIME?
SOVIET CONSUL ZHERKOV. I NEED YOU TO WORK WITH THE LOCAL POLICE. WE MUST HAVE ANSWERS BEFORE...
PLEASE, CARDONA, PUT THAT DOWN. IT'S VERY UNSETTLING.
THERE'S A SOVIET-AMERICAN TRADE DEAL IN THE WORKS. MR. ORT--STANDING OVER THERE--IS INVOLVED. BUT HE WON'T GO THROUGH WITH IT BECAUSE OF THE BEHEADINGS.
PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT WANTS THIS DEAL. MAYOR LAGUARDIA WANTS THE PRESIDENT TO BE HAPPY. WE CANNOT HAVE THIS HAPPENING!
I CAN TIE THIS UP RIGHT NOW, COMMISSIONER. SEEMS OUR LAST VICTIM--NICHOLS--WAS PART OF SOME SECRET ANTI-RED LEAGUE.
PLENTY OF OLD-MONEY TYCOONS IN IT. MAYBE SOME CHUMS OF MR. ORT'S. MAYBE EVEN YOUR HOST LAMONT CRANSTON.
FUNNY HOW THE NECK-SLICING HAPPENED IN HIS HOUSE-- AND HE SLIPPED OUT BEFORE THE QUIZZING COULD GET NASTY.
MR. CRANSTON HAD TO SEE HIS FRIEND MISS LANE BACK TO THE CITY! IF YOU'RE SUGGESTING THAT HE MIGHT HAVE HAD ANYTHING TO DO WITH THESE KILLINGS--
OH, LORD. ANTI-COMMUNIST LEAGUES... MILLIONAIRES CONSPIRING... IN THE PRESIDENT'S HOME STATE...
THE CITY COULDN'T TAKE THE SCANDAL, CARDONA!
THERE MIGHT BE ONE WAY TO HANDLE THIS. IF I CAN SPEAK TO MR. ORT...

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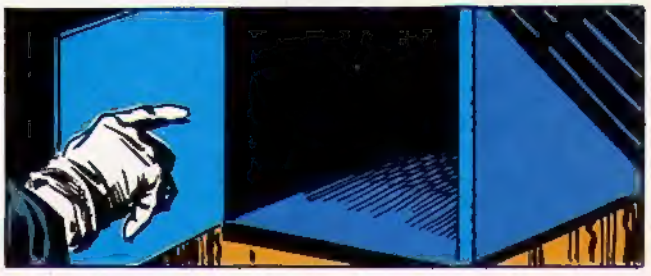
IT'S OVER NOW. ANASTASIA HAS FINISHED HER MISSION.
ALL MY COMRADES FROM YEARS AGO. YURKOVSKI, DRUBETSKOY ROSTOV...
ALL OF US WHO LINED UP AND GUNNED DOWN THE CZAR AND HIS FAMILY. UNDER ORDERS OF THE BOLSHEVIK COMMAND.
ONE BY ONE, IN RUSSIA, ACROSS EUROPE, AND FINALLY HERE. ZHERKOV WAS THE LAST.
I WAS THE ONE WHO TOOK PITY ON HER. WHO FOUND HER WOUNDED AND HELPED HER TO ESCAPE. SO I AM THE ONE WHO LIVES.
WHY DID SHE SEND THIS TO YOU?
SEEKING SOME SORT OF APPROVAL, PERHAPS? OR JUST SENDING ME A MAD-WOMAN'S THANKS.
SHE MADE CERTAIN THAT I KNEW SHE WAS NEAR, FROM THE FIRST DAY I ARRIVED IN AMERICA. AND I KNEW WHY.
YOU KNEW YOUR COUNTRYMEN WOULD BE MURDERED AND YOU DID NOTHING?
AM I MY COMRADE'S KEEPER?
ZHERKOV WAS BLACKMAILING ME. THIS WAS MY ONLY ROAD TO FREEDOM.
AND DON'T YOU THINK THERE MIGHT BE JUSTICE IN WHAT SHE'S DONE?
2

JUSTICE OR NO, IT IS A *CRIME.*
AND THE WEED OF CRIME BEARS *BITTER* FRUIT.

A CRIME *WHERE?*
IN THE U.S.S.R., SAVING HER LIFE MADE ME A CRIMINAL. *HERE* IT WOULD MAKE ME A *HERO.*
BUT IF I WERE TO SAVE A CONDEMNED REVOLUTIONARY HERE-- IF I'D FREED *SACCO* AND *VANZETTI* FROM JAIL--THEN WHAT?
THERE IS NO *ABSOLUTE* CRIME, NO *ABSOLUTE* EVIL!

AND *YOU?* I'VE HEARD ABOUT *THE SHADOW.* DON'T YOU DOLE OUT YOUR OWN *PERSONAL* JUSTICE?
I *NEVER* KILL FOR PERSONAL VENGEANCE.

NOR DO I BELIEVE THAT *SHE* WOULD. SHE HAS BEEN *FORCED* TO DO THIS BY ANOTHER.
THINK WHAT YOU LIKE. ALL I KNOW IS THAT I'M SAFE.



ARE YOU?
THEN WHY IS THE LAST COMPARTMENT *EMPTY?*

3

YOU'D BETTER BE TELLING ME THE TRUTH.
I TELL YOU, WE WANT RASPUTIN AND THE WOMAN--DEAD!
THEY WERE USEFUL FOR A TIME--PROTECTING US FROM PERSECUTION--
BUT NOW EVERY MURDER THEY COMMIT WILL BE COUNTED AGAINST US. THE WOMAN'S MADNESS WILL BRING DOWN HATRED ON THE HEADS OF THE GYPSY PEOPLE.
WE HAD ARRANGED WITH JOHN NICHOLS TO KILL HER--HE WANTED CONTROL OF RASPUTIN FOR HIS OWN CRUSADE. BUT SOMETHING WENT WRONG.
AND WHY DO YOU WANT HER DEAD?
I DON'T GIVE A DAMN ABOUT THE WOMAN. IT'S RASPUTIN! HE...ASSAULTED A WOMAN. A FRIEND OF MINE.
HA HA!
WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU LAUGHING AT?
HIS ASSAULT COULD NOT HAVE BEEN MUCH. THE ATTEMPTS TO KILL HIM YEARS AGO LEFT HIM...AN INCOMPLETE MAN. NOW HE CAN ONLY TEAR AT WOMEN'S CLOTHES--STARE--AND RAVE!
FOR CRIPES' SAKE...
FOR CRIPES' SAKE...
SCREEEEEE!
I'VE GOTTA GET TO MARGO!

MR. ORT, WE...NEED TO COME TO AN UNDERSTANDING...
IT'S COME TO MY ATTENTION THAT SOME PROMINENT BUSINESS PEOPLE MAY BE INVOLVED IN THESE...INCIDENTS. AN INVESTIGATION MIGHT BE...DISRUPTIVE TO AMERICA'S ECONOMIC RECOVERY...
THAT SO?
YES, IT IS...AND IF...IF YOU GO THROUGH WITH THIS TRADE AGREEMENT...WELL, THERE'LL BE NO NEED TO INVESTIGATE.
BUT IF YOU CANCEL... THEN MR. ROOSEVELT, YOU UNDERSTAND, WILL WANT TO KNOW WHY...
OF COURSE, WE CAN ASSIGN FULL POLICE GUARD TO YOU--
HU-HUH. TRYING TO KEEP YOUR BED FEATHERED, ARE YOU?
WHY, NO, MR. ORT! I'M THINKING ONLY OF THE--
WELL, I DON'T HAVE MUCH USE FOR GOVERNMENTS. NOT COMMUNIST, NOT FASCIST, NOT CAPITALIST. NO KIND. DON'T LIKE 'EM GETTING INVOLVED IN THIS KIND OF BUSINESS.
I GUESS I CAN TAKE THE CHANCE.
YOUR NATION IS GRATEFUL, SIR!
DAMN.
SNIKT
SO THE CASE SLAMS SHUT. OFFICIALLY.
BUT THIS BOYO ISN'T CLOSING IT. NOT 'TIL I CAN BAG THE GOODS ON THIS LEAGUE... AND THE COBALT CLUB... AND LAMONT CRANSTON.
5

MESSAGE FROM BURBANK, CHIEF! HARRY'S WAITING AT MARGO'S PLACE!
TAKE US THERE.
LEARN MUCH?
WHAT I SUSPECTED. HE CLAIMS ANASTASIA IS THE GUIDING MIND.
BUT YOU STILL THINK IT'S RASPUTIN?
HIS HYPNOTIC ABILITIES ARE STILL CONSIDERABLE. HE HYPNOTIZED HIS WAY INTO AND OUT OF THE COBALT CLUB, AND MY MANSION.
HE CAN SURELY CONTROL HER.
I DON'T KNOW, CHIEF.
BUT I HOPE YOU'RE RIGHT.
O-KAY. DO I DELIVER, OR DON'T I?
REMEMBER--IF THERE ARE ANY TRICKS--WE CAN STILL KILL YOUR WOMAN!
YOU OUGHTTA STAY OUT OF MOVIE THEATERS, PAL.
BOSS! BOSS!
HERE'S SOME BOYS WHO SHARE YOUR INTEREST IN RASPUTIN!
AND IF YOU'LL PARDON ME--

--I GOT SOME NEWS FOR YOU, KID!

...DO YOU KNOW WHAT SUSTAINS HIS LIFE?
THE WOMAN CLAIMS IT'S AN ELIXIR WHICH SHE KEEPS ON HER PERSON. BUT THAT MAY BE TRICKERY.
HE SEEMS BLINDED BY HER, EASILY MASTERED.

THAT MAY BE A TRICK OF HIS.
I DON'T THINK...
IT DOESN'T MATTER!

IT ONLY MATTERS THAT I STOP HIM. YOU MUST SEND A MESSAGE TO HIM.

OH, THANK GOODNESS, THANK GOODNESS.
THE DOCTOR TOLD ME, BUT...I COULDN'T BELIEVE...

WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO, IN TIME...
BUT WE CAN'T PROMISE WHEN. THE ONES WHO STILL SERVE HIM WON'T TALK TO US.
CHIEF? I HAVE AN IDEA. A LONG SHOT.

PERHAPS HE STILL HAS CONTACT WITH SOME OF THE WOMEN WHO FELL UNDER HIS SPELL.
I KNOW WHERE I CAN REACH ONE OF THEM...LUCILLE CHEVIOT.

YOU DID IT, DIDN'T YOU? DIDN'T YOU?
YOU KILLED MY POOR ALGIS!
HE DISCOVERED THAT WE WERE HYPNOTIZING YOU--TO LEARN WHAT HE HAD TOLD YOU OF THE SOVIET CONSULATE. RASPUTIN FOLLOWED HIM TO THE COBALT CLUB. YOUR POOR ALGIS MIGHT HAVE PLANNED TO REPORT US TO HIS FELLOW MEMBER, THE POLICE COMMISSIONER.
WE HAD NO GRIEVANCE AGAINST HIM, BUT WHAT ELSE--
HOW CAN YOU DO THESE THINGS?
SPARE ME YOUR JUDGEMENTS. YOU HAVE YOUR WEALTH, YOUR YOUTH--YOUR POSITION IN THE AMERICAN ARISTOCRACY.
YOU'LL SEE WHAT HAPPENS TO YOU WHEN YOUR WORLD CRUMBLES... WHEN IT'S TAKEN AWAY FROM YOU.
I WOULD NEVER... NEVER GIVE MYSELF TO A MONSTER LIKE THAT!
GIVE YOURSELF? I CAN TAKE YOU! YOU--AND ANY OTHER WOMAN! YOU'VE SEEN THAT!
YOU CAN TAKE MY MIND-- WITH THE HELP OF THAT WOMAN'S DRUGS--
BUT YOU CAN'T...DO ANYTHING, CAN YOU?
8

RRIINNNG
Y-YES ..THIS IS SHE...
A MESSAGE FOR...FOR... BROTHER GREGOR?
YES, I CAN REACH HIM IMMED--
ALL RIGHT. THE MAN WITH THE RING... AT THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE... BEFORE DAWN..
WHO WAS IT? WHO WAS IT?
I DON'T KNOW--A MAN'S VOICE-- A STRANGE VOICE--
THEN IT IS TIME--FOR HIM TO PAY FOR HIS SINS.
STOP!
YOU WANT TO PROTECT HIM! IT WAS ALWAYS HE WHO STOOD BETWEEN US! EVEN NOW--
NO! IT ISN'T THAT! I NEED YOU FOR ONE MORE MISSION!
9

ENOUGH OF YOUR MISSIONS! THIS IS MY MISSION! THE RING-- THE KEY TO MY SALVATION!
KRAAKKK
AND WHEN I'VE TAKEN IT--THEN I'LL HAVE SOME MISSIONS FOR YOU!
YOU AND YOUR AUNT WILL BE ABLE TO GO BACK TO YOUR LOVELY LIVES NOW, MISS CHEVIOT. THERE'S VERY LITTLE TIME LEFT IN MY LITTLE DRAMA.
AND I'LL HAVE TO FINISH IT MYSELF.
10

WHERE ARE YOU?
SINNER. DEVIL. DARK ANGEL. OLD FRIEND
WHERE ARE...
THE GIRASOL.
COME TO YOUR MASTER, GIRASOL!

COME TO YOUR LOVER!
NO...
NO! FAKE!
YOU HAVE ALWAYS BEEN EASILY DECEIVED, GREGOR
WHEN PRINCE YUSUPOV INVITED YOU TO DINNER THAT NIGHT IN 1916...YOU KNEW HE HATED YOU, FEARED YOUR POWER...YET YOU WENT.
ONLY TO BE POISONED, SHOT, THROWN INTO THE RIVER. AND BURIED.
BUT I STILL LIVE!
HOW? WHAT IS YOUR SECRET?
YOU WANT TO STEAL THAT FROM ME--AS YOU STOLE THE RING!
WHY DO YOU WANT THIS RING, RASPUTIN? YOUR HYPNOTISM IS GREATER THAN MINE ALREADY.
I ASKED MYSELF-- WHY DID SHE ALWAYS WANT YOU?
THEN I ANSWERED MYSELF. IT'S BECAUSE YOU HAD THE RING! YOU RULED HER SOUL!
12

I WANT YOU TO RELEASE HER, RASPUTIN.
ME? RELEASE HER?
SHE WILL NEVER BE YOURS.
BOOM
BOOM

SCHLIKK
BOOM

SCHLUKK
THUN

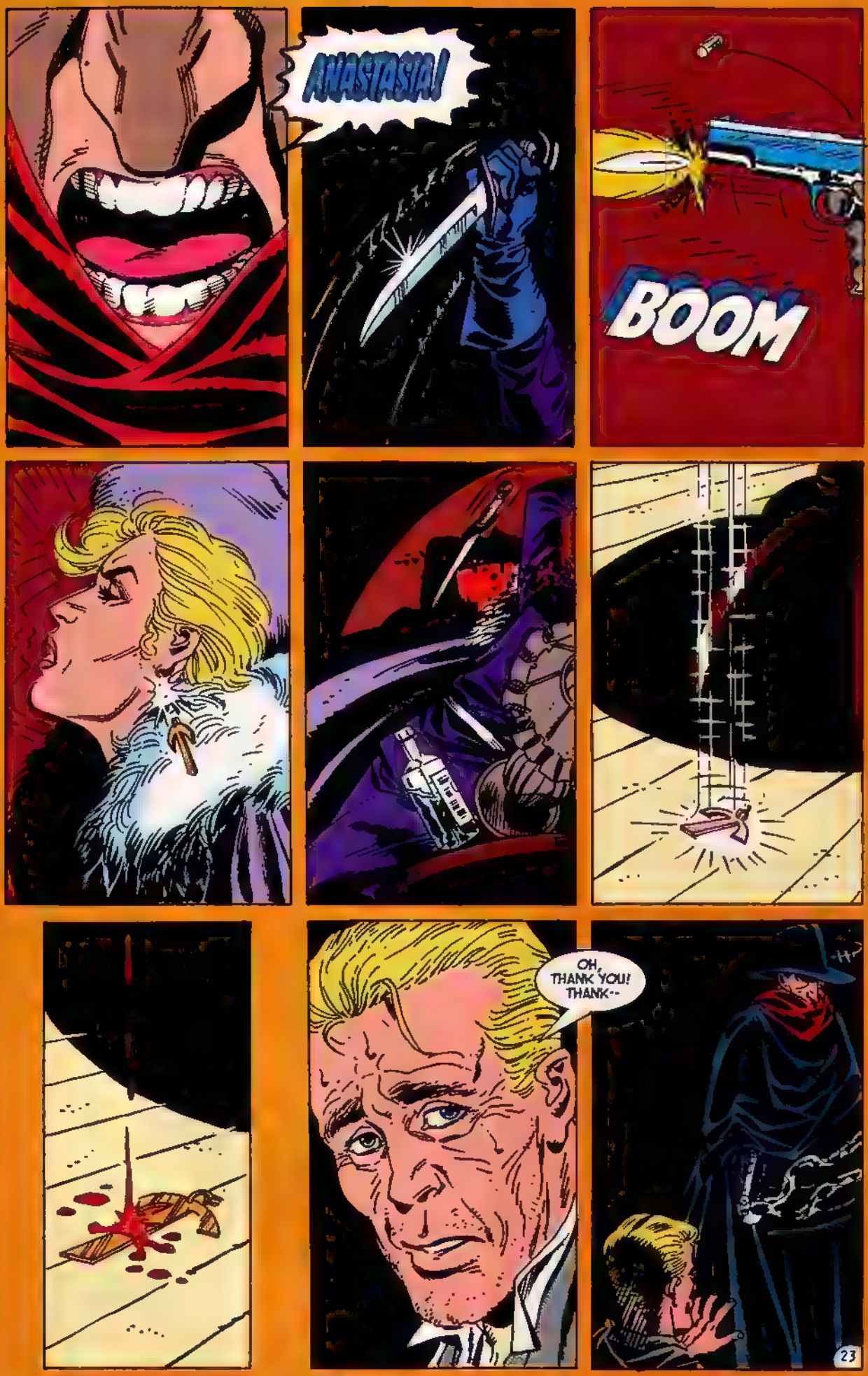
SPLISH
SPLOOSH

SEND A MESSAGE TO INSPECTOR CARDONA AT POLICE HEADQUARTERS. TELL HIM THE ASSASSIN IS DEAD. THE KILLINGS ARE DONE.
I DON'T KNOW, BOSS. MARGO WENT TO TALK TO THE CHEVIOT DAME ABOUT SOME.. PERSONAL BIZ
SEEMS YOUR FRIEND ANASTASIA HAD BEEN THERE. SHE LEFT A WHILE BACK.
WITH A GREAT, BIG KNIFE.
IS SOMEONE THERE?
OH!
SO, GRAND DUCHESS ANASTASIA. HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN? SEVENTEEN YEARS?
I RECEIVED YOUR LITTLE GIFT. I SUPPOSE YOU WANT ME TO THANK YOU.

WHAT HAPPENS NOW, DUCHESS? I SHOULD BECOME THE NEW CONSUL, MY POSITION IN THE PARTY SECURE AT LAST.
AND YOU? WILL YOU STAY IN AMERICA?
F-FASCINATING COUNTRY. DON'T YOU THINK? STRANGE, BUT...BUT PLEASANT FOR *US*, EH?
THE WORKERS ARE ALL *DEMOCRATS*, THE BOURGEOISIE ARE ALL REPUBLICANS, AND THE RULING CLASS...ARE ALL *COMMUNISTS*.
HEH.
DAMN IT, ANASTASIA-- WHAT *DO* YOU *WANT*?
I WANT TO *FINISH*!
20

PLEASE...
STOP.
I'M ..?
OH.
HA HA
THAT ISN'T LIKE YOU.. BLINDING YOURSELF THAT WAY...
YOU CAN'T SEE IT, CAN YOU? THINGS AREN'T AS THEY WERE IN THE OLD COURT. EVER SINCE RASPUTIN ROSE FROM THE GRAVE--I HAVE CONTROLLED HIM!
ALL THE KILLINGS--THEY WERE FOR ME!
RASPUTIN IS DEAD, ANASTASIA.
YOU ARE FREE.

BUT THEY ARE OVER NOW.
STAY BACK!
THERE IS ONE MORE--THE ONE I'VE ALWAYS PLANNED FOR LAST.
WHY? WHY VASILEVICH?
BECAUSE HE MADE ME LIVE!
HE STRANDED ME IN THIS DISINTEGRATING WORLD, THIS WORLD WHERE I HAVE NO PLACE, WITH ONLY MY SCARS TO KEEP ME COMPANY.
HE LEFT ME A LIVING CORPSE, A SHAPE WITHOUT FORM, A GESTURE WITHOUT MOTION...I SHOULD HAVE DIED WITH MY FAMILY!
LET GO OF THE PAST, ANASTASIA!
IT WON'T LET ME GO!
AND YOU? WHAT MADE YOU WHAT YOU ARE?
HAS THE PAST LET YOU GO?
PLEASE.
JUST LET ME FINISH.


ANASTASIA!
BOOM
OH, THANK YOU! THANK--
23

BITTER FRUIT
FROM THE SHADOW'S PRIVATE ANNALS, AS TOLD TO
GERARD JONES
WRITER
EDUARDO BARRETO
ARTIST
DAVID CODY WEISS
LETTERER
ANTHONY TOLLIN
COLORIST
BRIAN AUGUSTYN
EDITOR
EDUARDO BARRETO

DC COMICS INC.
666 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10103

JENETTE KAHN, President & Editor-in-Chief
DICK GIORDANO, VP-Editorial
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RICHARD BRUNING, Design Director
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L-5156

Dear Gerard Jones,

Terribly sly, Mr. Jones, terribly sly. The last time we saw the DC version of the Shadow—the Kaluta reprints apart—he had, er, lost his head.

Now, on page 2 of your revival, what do we find? A headless Lamont Cranston, a.k.a. the Shadow. Or do we? All is revealed and it turns out not to be the Shadow at all, but some poor bit part player (sic).

What are we supposed to conclude from this? Is it a hint that the '80s version of the Shadow should be treated like Frank Miller's DARK KNIGHT version of the Batman—as one of many possible futures but not "gospel"? Certainly your comments later about the Chaykin origin bear this out.

Of course, the Shadow is one of the last characters where you can worry too much about continuity. (Anyone remember the excruciating Archie super-hero *Shadow*, complete with yellow and red (?) costume?)

Still, I did sort of like the Helfer/Baker SHADOW of the '80s. Shame to see it go. Was it true Condé Nast pulled the plug because they didn't like their hero being, er, deconstructed (literally)?

Are we ever due to see the promised Special tying up the loose ends? After all, you can't leave the Shadow attached to a robot body like that forever. Can you?

Anyway, back to the new "old" Shadow. Not bad, actually. Barreto's art is convincing enough. He does a mean version of a moody Shadow without being too dependent on flashy effects. Especially fine were the scenes in the Soviet Consulate.

Plotwise, the first issue was intriguing. The idea of using historical events filtered through a modern perspective may well turn out to be the best approach for the material. Let's just not have too many stereotypes, shall we?

The agents are undoubtedly an important part of the whole Shadow concept. Glad to know you will be concentrating on developing their characters.

So, a promising debut. Now, about that Helfer/Baker Special...

Yours,
Nick Fletcher
London, England

I think your "one of many possible futures" theory sounds good to me. While I, too, enjoyed the Helfer/Baker run, I'm not going to lose sleep trying to make the versions connect. As for that Special concluding the '80s storylines, it's scheduled to come out one of these days—perhaps in one of those possible futures we've mentioned, who knows? Watch for the announcement.

No, it is emphatically NOT true that Condé Nast, the copyright holders of the Shadow, "pulled the plug." The good folks over there have always been most cooperative and helpful. The true and complete reason the H/B SHADOW was cancelled was that the creative team's schedules proved prohibitive. Plus, they had the Prestige JUSTICE INC. to complete.

Yes, I remember the super-hero Shadow, though I seem to remember him as green and blue.

* * * * *

Dear Brian,

Who knows what lurks in the mind of Gerard Jones? When I first heard that this bright young talent was taking over writing the Shadow, I had my doubts. I enjoyed the Helfer version and anticipated something similar from someone best known for a satire comic. While the pre-release talk made THE SHADOW STRIKES! sound more pulpy and serious, I still had my doubts.

The premiere issue arrived this week. I was impressed. Gerry has captured the flavor of the novels and the period quite well with a story that owes more to the original stories than any previous comics version. Mr. Jones is apparently a multi-faceted writer, a seeming rarity in graphic fiction today.

One can't help but comment on the Barreto art as well. While certain introduction panels did not introduce the characters clearly, this is but a minor complaint. The art was quite nostalgic, perfect to allow the reader to feel as if part of the era. While contributing a Kubert look, the art owes more to European artists.

In all, a very different package from much of what is seen in comics today. And this is good.

Mahalo,
Mark Lucas
San Francisco, CA

P.S. For a lettercol title, how about "Strike Back!"?

* * * * *

Dear Shadow-Lords,

It was Gerard Jones who brought me here. Everything I've seen with his name has been a stunner. His reviews in *Amazing Heroes*, the stories in SECRET ORIGINS, and of course, his groundbreaking history of the Silver Age (yes, I know he co-wrote it with Jacobs) are all classics. So when I saw his name attached to Depression-age Shadow tales, I knew I couldn't pass up THE SHADOW STRIKES! Truly a good move. We are off on our way.

I sort of liked Andy Helfer's Shadow. Bill Sienkiewicz's art scared me off, and all those ancient operatives seemed useless. But the character intrigued me. He didn't live in the DC Universe, had no real powers and ranked among the great American fictional legends. If only things weren't so weird in Helfer-land. But we are now back in the '30s. I, like Gerry, find that period to be a dark playground for the mind, a time of horror and of glory. After reading Hammett's original *Thin Man* novel, with its hints at that era's dark side, I wondered what more could be done with that age aside from a series of entertaining but unrealistic movies. This series promises to do just that. The panorama of history always makes for better stories than mystic mumbo-jumbo.

Right away, we jump into that history, plus visits by Anastasia and Rasputin. Wow. The mad monk is having a good year. First he possibly appears in Firestorm and now he comes back from the dead, as usual. And of course, we meet the original super-hero ne'er-do-well. I suspect there's more to this millionaire playboy than an aquiline Bruce Wayne. By the way, he immediately brings to mind Orson Welles. Just don't do any wine ads.

I look forward to a stunning series from Gerry. I know that Eduardo will do his usual best here. It's great to see his pencils and inks on a monthly series. Who knows what talent lurks in a comic? The Shadow knows.

Simon Del Monte
Jackson Heights, NY

As I said a couple of letters back: trust Gerry Jones to deliver. In the humble opinion of this funny book editor, Mr. Jones is one of the best new writers to grace comics in a long, long time. And he just gets BETTER!

* * * * *

Dear Brian,

As promised, here's my letter on the first issue of your newest THE SHADOW STRIKES!

I recall that when I wrote commenting on the demise of the previous

SHADOW book I had my doubts whether incoming writer Gerard Jones had the dramatic flair necessary to pull off a book on someone as dark as the Shadow. I was more reassured when I saw the first issue of EL DIABLO, a book I'm proud to say I now collect avidly—but still, the Shadow is an awfully big job for anyone to tackle.

I can now say that my worries were needless and that in future I'll try to have more faith in your judgment. Gerry set the mood for the Shadow very nicely indeed, aided and abetted, of course, by the sinfully appropriate artwork of Eduardo Barreto.

Of course, I would have appreciated it if the previously-announced SHADOW SPECIAL, concluding the Helfer-Baker plotlines, had shown up before this first issue; it would have been more pleasing from an aesthetic standpoint ... but, c'est la vie. Still, considering how long it's been in the works, I find it hard to believe that the book hasn't been completed yet. Oh, well...

As things stand right now, I'm quite impressed with the book, and of course I'll be right here for every issue. I do have one minor suggestion, however, and that is: tell Gerry not to be quite so wordy in future issues. This first issue bordered on being too text-heavy in some spots and while that's to be expected in a novel, in comics it tends to bog down the story flow. I understand his desire to emulate the pulp feeling as much as possible, but better to err on the side of caution, I say.

Best of luck,
David Peattie
Concord, CA

I think you'll note that the verbiage you mention has eased a bit, particularly in this issue. Point taken.

Thanks for the kind words, and for the opportunity to plug EL DIABLO. The book, set in modern day south Texas and featuring the exploits of a brand-new Hispanic masked hero, is one that both Gerry and I humbly suggest you check out. Please do.

*****

Dear Gerard, Eduardo, David, Anthony, and Brian,

I'm writing to congratulate you on what I consider to be a very fine first issue of THE SHADOW STRIKES! After many years of comic book reading, it's rare that I get excited by any particular series or individual issue, but "Death's Head" really did it for me. There are several aspects I want to comment on.

The cover was superbly rendered and created an immediate Shadow-esque atmosphere with its depiction of a rain-swept, bullet-strewn street whose moody blue and grey hues perfectly complemented the striking black and red of the figure of the Shadow himself. The interior art did well to generate a feel of the 1930's. Two of the reasons for this were the use of heavy lines and the occasional circular picture. But, more than that, I thought that the art really aided the written effort to make every character on view as distinct a personality as possible. I can hardly remember a comic book story where every character made such an immediate, individual impression as in "Death's Head." Sometimes, Eduardo, your work can be under-acknowledged and under-appreciated by fandom, but I think you've found your niche with THE SHADOW STRIKES! Perhaps this point is nowhere more apparent than in the layout, design, and execution of page 16 which, in terms of sheer style, is the Shadow series at its best.

Gerard, you seem to have made an astonishing transition from comic book critic/commentator to writer. I know you've had some professional practice before arriving on the Shadow's doorstep. Even so, your effort on issue #1 puts the efforts of many other writers on other titles to shame. I've already commented that the characters were all highly distinctive, yet you should also be commended for a tautly exciting and intriguing story. You said in the text page that Shadow stories began, traditionally, with a wallop and "Death's Head" certainly did. The full, page 2 rendition of a headless man sitting "comfortably" in an elite men's club stunned me, especially as I had been set up to believe the body belonged to Lamont Cranston, the Shadow!

"Death's Head" ran well in its entirety, which I consider no small feat, bearing in mind the variety of aspects within the story. They seem to be dovetailing nicely into the succeeding issue(s).

In closing, I'd like to add that I thought David, Anthony, and Brian did good lettering, coloring, and editing jobs respectively and ask for weirdness to play a high-profile role in the ongoing SHADOW STRIKES! I think the title is well-suited to it (as evidenced by that headless corpse) and I would like to see an occasional zombie, ghost, or demented doctor! Lastly, I'd also like to see a pin-up of Margo. Thanks.

Best wishes,
Paul Carbonaro
Los Angeles, CA

A pin-up of Margo, eh? We'll take it under advisement.

This seems like a good time to thank the artists of the pin-ups that we've run thus far: Luke McDonnell of THE PHANTOM in issue one and Denys Cowan from THE QUESTION and DETECTIVE whose art graced last issue's pin-up page. Great job, guys. This issue's is by our own Ed Barreto as a sort of teaser to next issue. Future guest artists are busily toiling in the shadows, so keep your eyes peeled. By the way, which artists would you like to see on the pin-ups?

*****

Dear Brian,

I enjoyed the premiere issue of THE SHADOW STRIKES! In particular, I'd like to single out the ever-improving art of Eduardo Barreto. The last of Barreto's art I saw was a two-parter in DETECTIVE in which he appeared to be paying homage to the much-deserving Alex Toth. Here his work seems to blend Tothian characteristics—outstanding storytelling, terrific interplay between shadows and light and utilizing each panel to its fullest—with the clean, realistic Barreto style we've grown accustomed to in NEW TEEN TITANS and other places. I look forward to seeing the directions in which he and Gerard Jones take the Dark Avenger.

Best,
Frank Balkin
Memphis, TN

*****

Dear Brian,

THE SHADOW STRIKES! #1 was just what I expected from the creative team. My compliments all around. The story had the feel of the old 1930's radio shows that I listen to on dark nights.

The artwork done by Mr. Barreto was, as usual, great.

I have a suggestion for the lettercol title: "THE SHADOW NOTES." What do you think?

Keep up the "MEGA" work.

Alan Thacker
Knights of the Citadel
Douglasville, GA

Thanks to you, Alan, and to all the correspondents who have offered letter column titles... but—what's the deal?! If you look to the top of this column, or any of our four issues' columns, you'll see that we already have a title: "The Shadow Knows." We like it and we think we'll keep it. Thank you.

*****

Well, that wraps it for this issue. Join us next time for a truly momentous event: the very FIRST ever team-up of the two greatest pulp heroes ... The Shadow *and* Doc Savage!! The four-part story is co-plotted by our Mr. Jones and SAVAGE writer Mike W. Barr, with art by regular DOC penciller Rod Whigham and Ed Barreto, who provides finishes. It'll be great and it starts here in THE SHADOW STRIKES! #5, continues in DOC SAVAGE #17 and then back here in SHADOW #6, concluding in DOC #18. The Master of Men and the Man of Bronze finally together—don't miss it!

Till then, take it easy and remember ... the Shadow knows!

—Brian

NEXT :
EDUARDO BARRETO